CONSTITUTION
CHARTER
and
BY-LAWS
of the
General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America

Adopted at a Regular Meeting of Conference, Held in the Alexanderwohl Church, near Newton, Kansas, October 19-27, 1896, with Additions 1899, 1911 and 1914.

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MENNONITE BOOK CONCERN
Berne, Ind.

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I. INTRODUCTION

"The General Conference of Mennonites of North America" in the name of a united body of Mennonite congregations, whose origin dates back to May 28, 1860, when the first meeting of the Conference was held at West Point, Iowa, by the representatives of three congregations. In the course of time other congregations from various states of the Union joined this conference in ever increasing numbers, a very important accession coming from the congregations that emigrated from Russia and other parts of Europe. Thus from a small beginning there has grown, under the gracious guidance of God, a considerable and still constantly increasing church body.

The General Conference owes

its origin and its growth to a deeply felt need of a closer union of the individual congregations, with the object of promoting the "unity of the spirit in the bond of peace," of a firmer establishing in the common faith, and of rendering mutual assistance in good works. In its meetings the Conference offers opportunity to consult and come to a mutual understanding in questions concerning our mission work and the welfare of our church. The Conference recognizes its work to be to assist in the building up of God's kingdom—at home in such branches of work as itinerant preaching, evangelization, founding of new churches where needed, publication, deaconess work, care of orphans, establishing of schools, care for the poor, etc., and abroad by sending out of missionaries and establishing mission stations, schools, and churches among the heathen in this and other lands.

II. CHURCH REGULATIONS

1. Our Common Confession.

This Conference recognizes and acknowledges the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the only and infallible rule of faith and life; for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. I Cor. 3:11. In matters of faith it is therefore required of the congregations which unite with the Conference that, accepting the above confession, they hold fast to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism on confession of faith, the avoidance of all oaths, the Christ-taught doctrine of peace and non-resistance, and the practice of a scriptural church discipline.

2. Admission.

All congregations of the Mennonite denomination which adhere to the above confession are in-

vited to unite with the General Conference and will be received into the Conference on application in the manner as hereinafter defined.

3. Secret Societies.

The General Conference takes the ground that all secret societies without exception are in their tendency in direct opposition to the letter and spirit of the Word of God. The apostolic admonition is,—"Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?" II Cor. 6:14, 15. Christians, as members of the body of Christ, can impossibly maintain such fellowship with those who deny Christ and God as the lodge requires of them in that they shall regard and treat one another as brothers, however

widely their heart attitude toward God and man would otherwise separate them. Therefore no congregation which tolerates among its members those belonging to secret societies shall be admitted into conference. Moreover conference asks of all congregations belonging to it that they shall energetically testify against the lodge evil, and that such congregations, if there are any, in which lodge members may already be found, shall strive by all evangelical means to purge themselves of this element.

4. Temperance.

Conference also recognizes the Bible teaching that a drunkard can not inherit the kingdom of God. Gal. 5:21. A congregation that tolerates among its members the drink evil, can not be regarded as Christian and can therefore not be a congregation in this conference. Recognizing in the so-called saloons and all kinds of drink-

houses one of the greatest and most common evils in human society, these should in no wise be countenanced by our congregations and members of our conference.

5. The Confession Unalterable.

There shall at no time any rules or decisions be made or adopted which shall in any way contradict the principles of faith as laid down in this constitution.

6. Rights of Congregations Inviolable.

The General Conference is not a legislative but an advisory body. Therefore no rule or decision may be passed prejudicial to the rights and independence of the individual congregations.

7. Ordination of Evangelists and Missionaries.

When Conference, through its respective committees, has occasion to call evangelists or mission-

aries who are to be formally ordained to their respective offices, the ceremony can be performed in accordance with the form given in "Handbook for Ministers", published by Conference.

III. CHARTER

We, the undersigned subscribers, with our associates, having been organized into General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, and being desirous of becoming incorporated as such agreeable to the provisions of the Laws of the State of Kansas, do voluntarily join ourselves together into a corporate body and do hereby certify:

First—That the name of this corporation shall be: "The General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America."

Second—That the purposes for which this corporation is formed, are:

a) The support of religious worship by the promotion and maintenance of home and foreign missions, religious schools, seminaries and other church institutions, also the publishing of church and Sunday school literature.

b) The soliciting, receiving and accumulation of funds for the support and maintenance of the above named institutions and for other benevolent purposes by accepting donations, contributions and legacies.

c) The disbursement of funds received for such purposes through committees or trustees duly elected or appointed by said General Conference.

3. That the places where the business of the corporation pertaining to the secular affairs of said General Conference is to be transacted, shall be Newton and Halstead, in Harvey Co., Kansas.

4. That the term for which this

corporation is to exist, shall be perpetual.

5. That the secular affairs of this corporation shall be under the control and management of nine trustees, to be elected by the delegates to said General Conference at its regular sessions. The names and residences of the trustees appointed for the first year are:

Christian Krehbiel,
Halstead, Harvey Co., Kan.
David Goerz,
Halstead, Harvey Co., Kan.
J. J. Krehbiel,
Newton, Harvey Co., Kan.
H. Suderman, Sr.,
Newton, Harvey Co., Kan.
A. B. Shelly,
Milford Square, Bucks Co., Pa.
Chr. Schowalter,
Primrose, Lee Co., Iowa.
Wm. G. Moyer,
Chalfont, Bucks Co., Pa.
J. B. Baer,
Richland Centre, Bucks Co., Pa.

S. F. Sprunger,
Berne, Adams Co., Ind.

6. That the By-Laws of this corporation shall be made by the Trustees of said Corporation, and be in force until the approval of the said General Conference at its regular or special sessions and they shall be deemed and taken to be the laws of said General Conference subordinate to the Laws of the State of Kansas and the Constitution of the United States.

In testimony whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names this 13th day of August, 1891.

CHR. KREHBIEL
DAVID GOERZ
J. J. KREHBIEL
H. SUDERMANN, Sr.
A. B. SHELLY
CHR. SCHOWALTER
WM. G. MOYER
J. B. BAER
S. F. SPRUNGER

State of Kansas,)
Office of Secretary of State)

I, William Higgins, Secretary of State of the State of Kansas, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original instrument of writing filed in my office, Sept. 5, 1891.

In Testimony Whereof I have hereunto subscribed my name and affixed my official seal. Done at Topeka, Kansas, this fifth day of September, A. D., 1891.

[Seal] WM. HIGGINS,
Secretary of State.

IV. BUSINESS REGULATIONS—BY-LAWS

A) EXTERNAL BUSINESS RELATIONS

1. The Election of Trustees.

The trustees shall be elected for a term of nine years, and the terms of the respective members shall be so arranged that at every tri-ennial meeting of conference one-third of the number only shall be elected.

2. Organization of Board of Trustees.

After every election the board of trustees shall organize themselves by choosing from their number a President, Secretary and Treasurer. They may also elect or appoint of their number such committees as they may deem advisable for the performance of their duties.

3. Rights and Duties of Trustees.

a) The Trustees have the right to receive bequests and donations, real and personal property, to dispose of and administer the same according to their best judgment. They shall pay out all moneys in their hands according to the directions of donors and the resolutions of conference. They shall be answerable to Conference for all their transactions and shall give a full report of all business relations at each meeting of conference.

b) All regulations adopted by the Board of Trustees shall be in accord with the constitution and decisions of conference and shall be binding until the next meeting of conference when they will be subject to approval or change by conference.

c) On questions as to the disposition to be made of money realized from bequests or donations received by the trustees and transferred to any of the standing boards or committees of Conference for use in their special line of work, the trustees shall have the right to advise and vote with the board or committee in question. In cases where the trustees for special reasons delay to pay over such money to a board or committee claiming the same, such board or committee shall have the right to appeal to the officers of Conference, and where these can not or will not decide the matter then to the Conference itself.

d) It shall be the duty of the Board of Trustees to represent Conference in a legal capacity, carrying into effect all decisions involving legal business transactions, subject to instructions of Conference.

B) INTERNAL BUSINESS RELATIONS

1. Membership Rights.

a) Any Mennonite congregation, of whatever branch of the Mennonite church, agreeing to and adopting the constitution, can become a member of this conference provided that on the question of its admission conference decides affirmatively by a majority vote. Such congregation is then endowed with all the rights and privileges of membership and assumes all the duties of the same as defined by these by-laws.

b) Questions of extending the right of participating in the deliberations of Conference to individ-

ual persons, societies, and corporations, shall also be decided by a majority vote of Conference.

c) Each congregation belonging to Conference shall be entitled to one vote for every thirty of its communicant members or any fractional part of this number.

d) Congregations that for any reason can not send delegates of their own to conference, may and should authorize brethren or delegates from other conference congregations to represent them with their voting power.

e) Congregations that neglect to have themselves represented at three consecutive tri-ennial conference meetings without giving valid reason for such neglect and leaving the official inquiry for such reasons unanswered, shall be regarded as withdrawn from the membership of Conference and the fact shall be properly entered on the minutes. Such congregations can, however, upon applica-

tion be again received into Conference in the regular manner.

f) The right of participation in the deliberations and discussions given to visitors of Conference does not include the right to vote. The right to vote given by Conference to persons in attendance shall be limited to the sessions of the Conference meeting at which it is granted and extend only to questions relating to church work, and that are fully disposed of by a vote on them. Such right does not extend to the business concerns of Conference which involve the rights and duties of members, therefore not to the election of standing boards and committees, nor to decisions the execution of which falls outside of the Conference meeting.

2. Organization and Election.

a) Upon the convening of Conference in regular or special meeting the delegates composing the

conference shall present their credentials from the congregations they are to represent. These being received and duly recorded. and an order for the session adopted the work of the Conference shall proceed.

b) The officers of Conference, President, Vice-President, and Secretary shall be elected either at the beginning or the close of each conference meeting and shall serve till their successors are elected and enter upon their duties. No person shall be eligible for the same office more than two terms in succession.

c) The President shall preside at all the sessions of conference, shall appoint all temporary committees, and in cases of a tie vote on elections and resolutions shall give the deciding vote.

d) The Vice-President shall, in the absence or inability of the President preside over the meet-

ings and exercise all the rights and duties of the President.

e) The Secretary shall have for safe keeping all minutes and papers belonging to Conference and shall carry on the necessary official correspondence.

f) A recording secretary shall be appointed by the President at each meeting of conference, who shall assist the secretary in making a true record of the proceedings and prepare them for publication.

g) The President and Secretary shall not at the same time be member of any standing board or committee, but shall in the interim between conference meetings stand independent of all boards and committees so that these may in difficult cases apply to the officers for advice, and take them into consultation.

h) The treasurer of the board of trustees shall also have charge

of the treasury of conference for general expenses.

3. Appeal.

Personal or congregational difficulties which by their nature should come before a congregation or district conference and generally find their solution there, can come before the General Conference for consideration in the following manner: If the matter can not be settled in the congregation, and the advice of the District Conference does not bring about a satisfactory solution, then, the District Conference having been duly notified, the matter can be appealed to the General Conference and may be taken up by the business committee.

4. Meetings.

a) The regular meetings of the General Conference shall be held every three years. Special meetings may be called by the officers whenever the representatives of at

least ten Conference congregations or one of the standing boards or committees request it.

b) At the close of each meeting, Conference shall decide upon the place for its next meeting. The fixing of the time for the meeting shall be left to the Conference officers.

c) During the deliberations of Conference the commendable parliamentary rule shall be observed that every person desiring to speak shall rise and first address the presiding officer to be recognized by him. While speaking he shall not be interrupted, so there shall be but one speaking at a time. But the chairman shall at all times have the right to call a speaker to order if he occupies more time than is allotted to the subject or is otherwise out of order.

Standing Boards, Committees, Etc.

a) Conference shall choose from

its own number, i. e., from the delegates and members of Conference congregations, a Board of Home Missions, a Board of Foreign Missions, and a Board of Publication, each to consist of six members, and a Business Committee of three members. They shall be chosen for a term of three conference periods or nine years, one-third of the number of each board or committee to be elected at each tri-ennial conference meeting.

b) Each board shall organize itself by choosing a President, Secretary and Treasurer.

c) The Board of Home Missions shall arrange and conduct in accord with the directions of Conference all work and undertakings of conference in the line of Home Missions for which no special committees have been constituted. They shall call the necessary workers such as itinerant preachers, evangelists, etc., and

administer the funds contributed for Home Mission work.

d) The Board of Foreign Missions shall call and send out missionaries and workers of the foreign mission field and conduct the work according to the instructions, decisions, and regulations of Conference, and administer the funds of the foreign mission treasury.

e) The Board of Publication shall have in charge the publication of church periodicals, Sunday school and other publications, the Conference book store and other departments connected therewith. The Board shall employ the necessary workers, such as editors, business manager, etc.

f) The Emergency Relief Commission shall accept gifts for the support of all charities and distribute them according to the directions of the donors and to use sums sent without directions according to their best judgment.

g) The Board of Education. The object of which is: To promote the development of Sunday school work. To promote the development of church schools. To promote the religious training in public schools. To assist Mennonite schools and colleges in the establishment of such courses of instruction which meet the needs of the Mennonite youth. To establish a fund in order to assist, either through loans or otherwise, needy students who are preparing themselves for the ministry or for the work in the mission fields. To grant financial aid to Mennonite educational institutions, insofar as this is possible and is deemed advisable. To make such arrangements as may be found necessary to carry out any one or all of the above named objects.

h) The Business Committee shall, prior to every meeting of Conference, prepare a program for the same, which shall be pub-

lished in the church papers three months before the convening of Conference. During the meetings the committee shall arrange the subjects for consideration and lay them in order before Conference. All questions and subjects which it is desired to have brought before Conference, are therefore to be presented to the business committee. The committee shall also, in agreement with the minister of the local congregation, arrange for the services to be held in connection with the Conference. The business committee shall also name for each conference a nomination committee consisting of seven members. This committee shall be selected from the different district conferences according to their numerical strength as nearly as possible. The names of the members of this committee shall be published with the program. The committee shall nominate two persons for each place

to be filled in conference election. The officers of the Conference, the trustees, the members of standing committees and boards shall be elected from the persons nominated; however, every delegate shall retain the privilege to supplement any nomination.

i) Conference shall elect a statistical secretary whose work it shall be to gather statistical reports on the number of ministers, church members, Sunday school pupils, amount of contributions for various purposes, etc., etc., and lay the same before conference.

k) If in the course of time other boards or committees shall become necessary, Conference can at any time create the same in the manner as above indicated.

l) All standing boards and committees shall hand in written reports at each regular meeting of Conference. Furthermore all decisions and instructions to workers, as also the reports of the lat-

ter, shall be officially preserved and laid before Conference whenever demanded.

m) The election of officers of Conference, trustees, and standing committees and boards shall be by ballot. Temporary committees shall be appointed by the President.

n) Vacancies in the standing committees occurring between conference meetings shall be filled for the interim by appointment by the Conference officers. At the following meeting Conference shall, besides the regular elections, fill also these vacancies for the balance of the unexpired terms.

o) No person shall be chosen upon more than one of the standing boards or committees. But the trustees being a purely business board, shall be eligible to any of the standing church boards. Likewise members of standing

committees may be appointed on temporary committees, which have to serve only during the meeting of conference.

p) The boards and committees shall always be elected in the same order in which their reports are called for at that meeting of Conference.

6. Duties and Rights of Conference Members.

a) Each congregation belonging to the Conference has, besides the rights above defined, also the right of ownership in all the Conference property. But all these rights cease when a congregation withdraws or is expelled from Conference.

b) Conference expects of all its congregations that as far as possible they shall be represented at every meeting and that they seek to further the interests of Conference during and between the meetings.

7. Treasuries.

Conference has the following treasuries and reserves to itself the right to increase or diminish the number according to its needs:

a) A general treasury to defray the expenses connected with Conference meetings and such other expenses as can not properly be paid out of any of the other treasuries. This treasury is in charge of the treasurer of the board of trustees.

b) A treasury for Home Missions which is in charge of the treasurer of the Home Mission Board.

c) A treasury for Foreign Missions in charge of the treasurer of the Board of Foreign Missions.

d) A board may choose its treasurer from outside its own number in which case the person so chosen shall be, by virtue of

his office as treasurer, a full voting member of the board.

8. General Provisions.

a) All resolutions and decisions of Conference passed prior to the adoption of this constitution and which conflict in any way with any part of the constitution are hereby repealed.

b) Conference can make amendments to this constitution by a two-thirds vote in favor of any amendment. The proposition for an amendment must be put into the hands of the program committee at least three months prior to the meeting of Conference at which it is to be voted on and shall be published with the program of the conference.

c) No amendment to the constitution shall be voted on at the same session at which it is for the first time brought up for discussion.